

A background image of a student holding a spiral notebook and a pencil, with a blue overlay. The student is looking down at the notebook.

Supporting Immigrant Students in Uncertain Times: Strategies for Schools

**Re-Imagining
MIGRATION** 

Overview

As we navigate a rapidly changing landscape regarding immigration policies, it's vital that our schools remain safe havens for all students, especially those from immigrant backgrounds. The upcoming changes in U.S. immigration policy have sparked fear and anxiety among students, families, and educators alike.

It's crucial that we recognize that the Supreme Court has ruled that all young people have the right to receive a quality education, regardless of their immigration status. As Alejandra Vázquez Baur from the National Newcomer Network points out, many educators are unaware of this fact, and this knowledge gap can have serious consequences for our students' well-being and academic success.



Guidance for Administrators

Before reimagining strategies to support immigrant students, it is essential for school administrators to gather relevant information and understand the broader context in which they operate. Recognizing that local and federal policies are changing, we have a duty to stay informed and up to date. Here are key actions to take:

- **Engage with Local Officials:**

- Communicate with city, town, and state officials to gain insights into local immigration laws and policies. Understanding the legal landscape is crucial for effectively supporting immigrant students and their families.
- Attend meetings or forums where immigration issues are discussed to stay informed about any changes in policies or practices that may impact your school community. Use your voice and advocate for your students and their families to ensure their educational rights are prioritized.
- Build relationships with officials to foster open communication channels, ensuring that your school is aware of any initiatives or resources available to support immigrant families. Identify points of contact and channels of communication.



- **Collaborate with Peers:**

- Connect with administrators and educators in neighboring communities to share experiences, strategies, and best practices related to supporting immigrant students.
- Participate in regional or state-level discussions focused on immigration and education, allowing for a collective approach to addressing challenges and sharing resources.
- Create a network of support among schools to develop a unified response to immigration issues, enhancing the safety and well-being of all students.

- **Understand Local Responses:**

- Investigate how local officials plan to respond to requests from immigration authorities and communicate this information to school staff and families.
- Ensure that school policies align with local practices regarding interactions with immigration officials, fostering a consistent approach across the community.

Key Strategies for Supporting Immigrant Students

Schools must take proactive steps to address the needs of immigrant students. From educating staff about legal rights to fostering a sense of belonging, these strategies aim to empower students, create safe spaces, and cultivate a supportive community. By focusing on inclusion and understanding, schools can transform into places where every child feels valued and supported.

- **Educate and Empower:**

- Clarify the legal rights of immigrant students to staff and members of the school community (including parents and parent associations) to ensure immigrant students receive the education they are entitled to, regardless of their immigration status.
- Educate all school staff, including teachers, administrators, and support personnel, about students' rights and school district policies regarding interactions with law enforcement and immigration officials.
- Review protocols for responding to situations involving government officials, including immigration enforcement officers, on school premises.
 - Provide clear guidance on appropriate actions and responses through specific examples and scenarios to ensure staff are prepared.

- **Cultivate Belonging:**

- Assess and improve school practices to foster a sense of belonging for all students, particularly immigrant students.
- Create opportunities to celebrate diverse backgrounds that make up the school community, making those identities visible.
- Organize school-wide events that celebrate various cultures and connect with community organizations, allowing students to share their heritage through food, music, and traditions.
- Create Safe Spaces: Designate areas within the school where students can gather, share experiences, and receive support from peers and staff.
- Provide information about resources and people to speak with to address the unique challenges faced by these students in light of current immigration concerns.

- **Encourage Peer Support:**

- Implement buddy systems or peer mentoring programs to help newcomer students acclimate to their new environment. Building friendships can significantly help students navigate this challenging time.
- Connect immigrant students with trained mentors who provide guidance and support in navigating the school environment.
- Form student-led alliances that promote belonging and community among immigrant students, fostering a supportive atmosphere within the school.
- Ensure that mentors and alliance members help immigrant students connect with essential resources and opportunities available within the school and community.

- **Address Bullying Seriously:**

- Establish clear policies and practices for addressing bullying and harassment. Every student deserves to feel safe and valued in their school community. Ensure there are consequences for perpetrators and support for victims, ensuring a fair and transparent process. Discuss potential scenarios with colleagues so you are prepared to respond.
- Clearly state that anti-immigrant bullying and rhetoric are unacceptable, regardless of the source—whether from students, school staff, or families in the community.
- Create anonymous reporting systems for students to safely report bullying incidents, ensuring they feel secure in voicing their concerns.
- Train students and staff on how to recognize bullying and empower them to intervene safely, fostering a culture of support and accountability.
- Introduce restorative approaches that focus on understanding the impact of bullying and repairing harm without pressuring the victim to forgive.

Review Checklist

Open and empathetic communication is the cornerstone of supporting immigrant students and their families. By providing accurate information, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and partnering with local organizations, schools can build trust and ensure families feel informed and supported. Transparent communication reinforces the school's commitment to protecting and uplifting every student.

Foster open lines of communication between educators, families, and students using their preferred language.

- ☐ Organize ongoing guardian/teacher conferences, sharing both academic, social, and emotional observations. Ensure you hear from the parent's perspectives as well.
- ☐ Provide clear, structured, and frequent opportunities for families to ask questions during school meetings or through surveys. Ensure there is an anonymous option.
- ☐ Create a dedicated email or phone line for families to communicate directly with school staff.

Encourage regular dialogue to create a supportive environment.

- ☐ Hold classroom and schoolwide discussions about the expectation of inclusivity and respect.
- ☐ Schedule one-on-one check-ins with students to discuss their concerns.
- ☐ Have plans in place to preempt, end, and/or remediate breakdowns in school culture.
- ☐ Offer forums or workshops for families to share their feedback and ideas.

When students express concerns about their families' well-being, educators should respond with empathy, acknowledging their fears and validating their feelings.

- ☐ Train staff to actively listen and respond with compassion when students share personal concerns. Practice scenarios during PD and create supplemental support for any staff who struggles.
- ☐ Promote access to culturally competent, destigmatized school counselors or social workers for students needing support.
 - ☐ Ensure students and families are aware of available mental health resources and feel comfortable seeking help.
 - ☐ Clearly explain mandatory reporting requirements in a transparent and accessible way to build trust and understanding.
- ☐ Follow up with individual students on a regular basis to ensure they feel supported and heard. Guarantee that every student has at least one staff member responsible for staying up to date on their holistic experience.



Share accurate information about students' rights and school policies regarding immigration and ICE presence, ensuring families feel informed and secure. Ensure that students and families understand that laws and policies are constantly changing and they should do their best to monitor any changes.

- ☐ Distribute informational materials in multiple languages explaining student rights and school policies.
- ☐ Host informational sessions or webinars for families to address questions about immigration-related concerns.
- ☐ Ensure staff is trained to understand and communicate these rights clearly to families.

Create a safe space for families to ask questions about immigration issues without fear of judgment or repercussions.

- ☐ Designate a specific staff member or team to handle sensitive family inquiries confidentially.
- ☐ Set up private meetings or drop-in hours, off campus if necessary, where families can seek guidance.
- ☐ Emphasize the school's commitment to non-judgmental support in all communications.

Keep families informed in their preferred language about any changes in school policies or protocols related to immigration, ensuring transparency and trust within the community.

- ☐ Send out updates through newsletters, emails, or phone calls.
- ☐ Post policy updates on the school website and social media.

Be clear about the limits of your knowledge as school staff, especially regarding legal or immigration matters.

- ☐ Maintain a living list of local legal aid organizations or immigration attorneys and community organizations to share with families when needed.
- ☐ Inform families that while school staff cannot provide legal advice, they can connect them to trusted resources.
- ☐ Be upfront about what kind of reporting is mandated as well as what will remain confidential.
- ☐ Reassure families that their concerns will be handled with confidentiality and care.



Clearly communicate the school's commitment to protecting students and families from discrimination or bullying, reinforcing a culture of safety and respect.

- ☐ Display posters and signage around the school promoting diversity, inclusion, and anti-bullying policies.
- ☐ Train staff and students on how to recognize and report discrimination or bullying. Conduct evaluations and provide resources and additional coaching if people need more support.
- ☐ Publicly affirm the school's discrimination policy, including specific language about anti-immigrant harassment in newsletters, assemblies, and meetings.

Partner with local organizations to provide resources and support for families, enhancing communication and understanding of available assistance.

Examples of actions:

- ☐ Collaborate with community organizations to host workshops on immigration and social services.
- ☐ Distribute flyers or materials from local nonprofits offering resources for immigrant families.
- ☐ Invite representatives from these organizations to attend school events and meet with families.

By fostering an inclusive environment that promotes understanding and respects the law, we can ensure that our schools remain safe havens for every child. As we face the challenges ahead, let's not forget the resilience and strengths that immigrant students bring to our schools. Let's keep that in mind while ensuring that every child feels safe, valued, and empowered to succeed.



Belonging Begins in Schools